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ABSTRACT

This paper describes Swedish higher education, its place in the overall education system, enrollments, standards, graduate education, teachers, and organization. A brief history of the system focuses on reforms since the 1950s that have dramatically changed all of education in Sweden. Data on enrollment show that 35 percent of young people attend higher education within 5 years of completing secondary education. Discussion of entrance requirements describes general admission requirements and in some cases special admissions requirements particular to specific types of institutions. The organization of study in 100 general study programs established by Parliament and the grading system are explained. A section on college faculty covers three categories: (1) professors, with some teaching commitments but primarily engaged in research; (2) senior lecturers; and (3) lecturers. A section on overall organization describes governance through the National Board of Universities and Colleges which is charged with promoting compliance with the goals and guidelines defined by government, institutions of higher education as central government agencies, student financial assistance from the central government, and the role of the student union, a type of "trade union" providing representation and extensive services such as housing and health and medical services. (JB)

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Higher Education in Sweden

ED 365 201

Fact Sheets on Sweden



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Higher Education in Sweden

The Swedish educational system has undergone a continuing series of transformations since the 1950s. A nine-year comprehensive compulsory school and an upper secondary school which integrates theoretical and vocational study programs have gone into operation. Adult education has been expanded and in 1977 a far-reaching reform of the higher education system took place. It involved the creation of a single and coherent system for all types of post-secondary education, the decentralization of decision-making, broadened admission policies for higher education, better geographic distribution of educational programs, the creation of recurrent educational opportunities and new measures to strengthen links between post-secondary education and research and create closer ties between education and other areas of society.

The new Swedish collective name for higher education, *högskola*, encompasses not only traditional university studies but also those at the various professional colleges and a number of programs previously taught within the upper secondary school system. Most of the programs included in the broadened definition of higher education are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science. In addition, there are a number of programs under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture. Those responsible for the higher education system are the central government, the county councils and some municipalities. Local government-operated higher education consists of the programs once administered as part of the upper secondary school, but which have now been transferred to the higher education system; most of these programs involve health care training.

An important part of the higher education system is research. (See Fact Sheet FS 24, Research Planning and Organization.) Practically all higher education research is integrated with and founded on close, local co-operation with the undergraduate and postgraduate study programs of the educational establishment concerned. This applies both to basic research at higher education institutions and to what is known as sectorial (i.e. externally funded) research.

In the university cities (Stockholm, Uppsala, Linköping, Lund, Göteborg and Umeå) and in Luleå, higher education institutions have permanent resources for research and research training. In addition, the aim is for non-research institutions also to have some form of research link. For this reason, contact is maintained in various ways between research and these institutions, e.g. through lectures given by researchers. Special central government grants are available for research links of this kind.

Enrollments

Slightly more than 35% of young persons in Sweden go on to higher education within five years after completion of their upper secondary schooling. About 65% of those opting for 3- and 4-year lines of upper secondary school enroll for higher education. First-time enrollments every year total about 45,000.

Apart from all the students coming straight from school, the post-secondary student population includes a large proportion of

mature students, i.e. students who have previously acquired various amounts of work experience.

To make it easier for students who have regular jobs to take advantage of educational opportunities, single-subject courses (see below) are often given in the evenings and on a part-time basis. About 15% of these courses are given in the form of "distance teaching," which is carried out mainly by correspondence. This type of study allows a person to take most of a course at home, traveling to a town with an institution of higher education only occasionally for seminars and examinations.

In 1989/90, the number of students enrolled for undergraduate studies (including single-subject courses) was about 191,000 (58% women) and for postgraduate studies about 14,000 (33% women) making a total of about 205,000 (full-time and part-time students).

Entrance requirements and admissions

To be admitted to higher education programs in Sweden, a student must first fulfill the *general admission requirements* which are common to all study programs, and then meet the *special admission requirements* which may be imposed on applicants to a particular study program or course.

The general admission requirements are completion of at least a two-year program at an upper secondary school or another equivalent course within the Swedish educational system, for example at a folk high school (residential adult school), plus a knowledge of the Swedish and English languages equivalent to at least two years at upper secondary school. A person can also fulfill these requirements by being at least 25 years old, having a record of at least four years of work experience, and possessing a knowledge of English equivalent to two years at upper secondary school.

To enter most study programs and courses, a person must also fulfill special admission requirements, i.e. a student must have upper secondary-level knowledge of the particular subjects essential to that study program or course.

Special rules exist for determining which applicants with foreign educational backgrounds fulfill the general admission requirements. A student must have completed the equivalent of at least a two-year program at an upper secondary school. He also has to meet certain requirements concerning knowledge of Swedish and English. This category of student must also fulfill the appropriate special admission requirements. A visiting student must have a residence permit before leaving for Sweden. In addition, he or she must be admitted to a preparatory course in Swedish (which takes one year to complete) as well as to the program chosen. It is compulsory for the student to have learnt English before coming to Sweden. At present there are 300 places available for visiting students.

If the number of applicants to a study program exceeds the number of available places, a selection is made from among qualified applicants. For a proportion of places (the actual proportions will vary from one study program to another, partly de-

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pending on the recruitment situation) selection is based on school marks only. Selection for another proportion of the places available is based on results in the university standard aptitude test. Credits for work experience may be added to this test result. At least one third of the available places is reserved for each method of selection, i.e. school marks and the aptitude test. Apart from these two formal selection procedures, a limited number of students are admitted following an informal, individual assessment of their qualifications.

Opportunities for admission are to be equal regardless of nationality and of the country in which an applicant's secondary education was received. This means that immigrants, refugees, students from other Nordic countries and Swedish students with foreign qualifications will have the same chances of admission as those with Swedish upper secondary qualifications. Special rules apply to visiting students.

These rules apply to most study programs. Special procedures, however, apply to a number of programs, mainly in the humanities.

Selection to single-subject courses is made in different ways depending on the type of course, recruitment situation, etc. It is up to the individual university/university college to decide upon the selection procedure to be adopted.

The structure of study programs

A major portion of Swedish undergraduate education is organized into about 100 *general study programs* established by Parliament. These specializations or full-degree programs vary in length from 1 to 5 1/2 years. Each program consists of *courses* varying in length. Instruction in these general study programs is designed to meet vocational training requirements of a permanent and general nature. Each program may be classified within one of the following five vocational training sectors: 1) technical, 2) administrative, economic and social work, 3) health, 4) teaching, and 5) information, communication and cultural.

When Parliament decides which general study programs are to exist, it also specifies the length and major aims of each program. In addition, Parliament establishes an economic framework. All this is based on Government proposals.

For each general study program there is a general curriculum describing its organization and structure, duration, admission requirements and so on. This forms the basis of a local curriculum and syllabi, containing more detailed provisions.

Universities and university colleges also establish *local study programs* on their own initiative. These, like the general study programs, vary in duration. The purpose of the local study programs is to harness local resources and cater to the educational needs and preferences of a locality or region.

Local study programs often provide unique specialties. Experimental interdisciplinary combinations, e.g. science and economics, are not uncommon.

Practical circumstances permitting, an *individual study program* can be set up if one or more students find that the existing amenities of a higher education institution do not meet their requirements.

The age distribution of students in undergraduate education, 1989/90

Age group	%
Through 24	45
25-34	33
35 and up	22

There are also *single-subject courses*, established by the governing board of each institution of higher education. A single-subject course may be one of the courses included in a study program, which can also be taken separately. There are also single-subject courses unconnected with any full study program. These are mainly intended as subsequent or further education. They are heavily subsidized as a means of supporting recurrent education at post-secondary level.

Short-cycle technical-vocational (YTH) studies are a special form of higher education in Sweden. The aim of these programs is to provide instruction on a post-secondary level in areas that so far have entirely lacked such training. The courses deal primarily with technical fields, for example the steel industry. To be admitted, a student must have worked a number of years in the appropriate industry. Formal school qualifications are considered less relevant.

The number of students in 1989/90 was 205,000 (full-time and part-time students). These were distributed in the following way (round numbers):

	Number of students	Full-time equivalents	% women
<i>Undergraduate studies, including local study programs</i>			
Education for technical professions	36,000	28,000	23
Education for administrative, economic and social work professions	37,000	28,000	55
Education for health professions	27,000	22,000	80
Education for teaching professions	21,000	17,000	82
Education for information, communication and cultural professions	6,000	5,000	68
Single-subject courses	64,000	34,000	61
<i>Postgraduate studies</i>	14,000	10,000	33

Points and marks

The scope of a given study program is measured using a point system. One point is equivalent to one week of full-time study. One academic year thus consists of 40 points, and the year is divided into two terms.

Marks are generally given on a three-level scale: Fail, Pass and Pass with Distinction. A number of courses use, however, only a two-level scale.

After completion of studies, the student receives a diploma. Where these studies have comprised a full study program, the diploma will indicate the name of the degree earned. All such names include the Swedish word *examen* (degree), regardless of the time required to complete the study program. The name of the degree also indicates the field of studies or the occupation involved, e.g. Master of Laws or University Certificate in Operating Room Nursing.

Postgraduate education

Postgraduate education is given at the universities, the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, the Karolinska Institute, the Stockholm Institute of Education, the Stockholm School of Economics, Chalmers University of Technology and Luleå University College and Institute of Technology.

The Swedish system of postgraduate and research education is based on the principle that a person's studies following the first degree should be systematically planned. A graduate student should take a number of courses and also write a doctoral dissertation. It should normally be possible to complete one's postgraduate studies within four years if studying full-time. Each student is entitled to individual supervision. The dissertation, which is the most important part of a postgraduate program, is defended in public and receives either a Pass or Fail mark. It may be published either as a monograph or as a so-called composite dissertation, consisting of a number of research papers and a summary. If a graduate student passes the necessary courses and the dissertation is accepted, he or she receives the doctorate.

During the last few years the former degree of licentiate, a research degree with a shorter qualifying period (normally 2-2 1/2 years), has been reintroduced in several faculty sectors.

A student must meet both general and special admission requirements to be accepted for postgraduate studies. The general requirement has been set at 80 points, i.e. two years of full-time study. This means that most general study programs will qualify a student for postgraduate studies. The special requirements include previous knowledge of one or more of the relevant subjects or the need to have other experience. Moreover, the department concerned and its research advisers judge the student's fitness and ability to complete postgraduate studies.

In some fields there are also training programs that assume previous undergraduate education but are not research training. Examples of such advanced training courses are specialist training for nurses and training for remedial teachers.

Teachers

One of the aims of the 1977 higher education reform was for teachers to act more as intermediaries between undergraduate studies and research. Thus in 1986 the structure of higher education teaching appointments was completely revised. The basic idea is for duties of different kinds—teaching, research, personal study, educational counseling and administration—to be included in one and the same appointment. What used to be a plethora of different appointments has now been reduced to three categories: professors, who have some teaching commitments but are engaged chiefly in research; senior lecturers (*högskolelektorer*); and lecturers (*högskoleadjunkter*). To qualify for a position as a senior lecturer a person must have a doctorate or the equivalent background. He or she is supposed to be active in both research and teaching. For a post as lecturer no doctorate is required. The main task for this latter category will be undergraduate instruction.

One of the innovations introduced by the new structure of appointments is that teaching proficiency displayed during undergraduate instruction has also been made a criterion of professorial appointments. Another is that the *prefekt* (see below) has been given wider responsibilities as "Director of Operations" in charge of finance and long-range planning. This latter change reflects a bid for decentralization and greater cost-awareness.

Economic resources, intake capacity and location of programs

The factors which determine how many students can be offered places in the higher education system are society's needs for a trained labor force and the individual desires and needs of students. The ultimately decisive factor is what resources the public sector considers possible to allot for higher education, in competition with other public programs.

A fundamental principle in appropriating funds is that each of the various institutions of higher education should, to the greatest possible extent, decide how to use these funds to fulfill the goals that have been established. Another basic principle is that appropriations for undergraduate education are kept separate from funds for research and postgraduate education. This planning principle does not prevent undergraduate, postgraduate and research programs from being linked together in their day-to-day operations.

The following section describes conditions prevailing within the portion of the higher education system run by central government authorities. Higher education institutions operated by county councils and municipalities receive central government subsidies. Each county council or municipal government is responsible for the remaining costs. It should be added that county councils and municipalities are entitled to levy local taxes.

Institutions of higher education are central government agencies, which submit annual budget proposals for their operating funds. In January each year the Government presents its overall central government budget bill to Parliament, which then decides what money will be appropriated for the fiscal year beginning that July. Funds for education and research are placed at the direct disposal of the institutions of higher education. Only in exceptional cases does the Government specify in detail how the money should be used.

Parliament decides each year on how many places there are to be in higher education. There are two different ways of indicating how many students will be accepted at the institutions. A number of study programs have restricted admission (*numerus clausus*). These include studies at medical schools and engineering colleges, for which Parliament decides the number of admissions on the basis of Government recommendations. The universities and professional colleges may make small adjustments in the number of students they admit. The number in other study programs is set as follows: Parliament, on the basis of a Government recommendation, appropriates funds for a group of study programs at a given institution, indicating a planned number of admissions for each program. In these cases the institution itself decides what maximum figures to impose for admission to each study program. Examples of such programs are economics, law and religious studies.

There are permanent facilities for central government-operated higher education programs at 24 locations in Sweden, from Luleå in the north to Lund/Malmö in the south. As mentioned previously, higher education institutions in seven of these towns have permanent resources for research and postgraduate education.

The central government appropriations for universities and university colleges totaled SEK 11,400 million for the fiscal year 1989/90. Of these, 5,120 million went to

undergraduate education, 3,600 million to research and postgraduate education, 2,000 million to premises and 680 million to other purposes.

The organizational structure of Swedish higher education

The National Board of Universities and Colleges (*Universitets- och högskoleämberget, UHA*), headed by the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities and Colleges, is the central authority for higher education, charged with promoting compliance with the goals and guidelines defined by Parliament for higher education within the domain of the Ministry of Education and Science. It has the task of following up, evaluating and supervising activities in the higher education sector. It is also responsible for admission to general study programs. The Board will be replaced in July 1992 by two new agencies: a secretariat for evaluation and quality control, and an organization responsible for services to the universities and the general public.

Higher education programs under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture are organized in a somewhat different fashion. The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences carries out teaching, research and development work. Its board of governors functions both as an executive body for the institution and as a government agency directly under the Government. The University of Agricultural Sciences consists of three faculties. For undergraduate education there are a number of program committees.

In addition to their undergraduate education, the university colleges frequently offer shorter programs, e.g. economics or technical subjects, catering for particular educational requirements in the region concerned. In this way the university colleges have come to play an important part in the economic life of their surrounding communities.

In Sweden all institutions of higher education are central government agencies (with the exception of the Stockholm School of Economics, which is run by a private foundation, with substantial central government support). Their employees are national civil servants, and their students pay no tuition fees.

At present there are 35 institutions of higher education in Sweden, with the highest body in each being the governing board (senate or council). This board consists of 1) the rector of the institution (vice chancellor or college president), 2) six representatives of public interests, 3) two representatives of activities within the board's field of activities. Two student representatives are entitled to sit on the board. Those members representing public interests and the activities are appointed by the Government. Most members within the former group represent political parties; members are also drawn from other sectors, such as economic and cultural life. The governing board has overall responsibility for all operations within the institution, e.g. economic administration and planning, personnel matters and the like. The higher education reform of 1977 involved a decentralization of decision-making rights on many issues, not least to the governing boards of the individual institutions. The chief representative of each institution is the rector, appointed by the Government on the basis of recommendations by the institution's governing board. At larger institutions of higher education, where both

Universities and university colleges



teaching and research are pursued, there is also an administrative director, appointed by the Government.

The smallest working unit within the higher education system is the *department*. It either provides undergraduate education alone or else combines undergraduate and postgraduate education with research. A department is headed by a board including representatives of all categories of people active in the department. The head of the board is called the chairman (*prefekt*). In some cases, a department may be run by a chairman and have no board. The governing board of each institution of higher education decides what departments will exist.

For undergraduate education, there are *program committees*. Such a committee exists for each of the general study programs taught at a given location, for a group of general study programs, or for all programs within a vocational training sector. The program committee decides how a program of instruction is to be organized and implemented. One third of the committee consists of outside representatives of the appropriate occupational categories. There may also be representatives of technical and administrative staff at the institution.

Postgraduate education and research are organized into *faculties*. There are two bodies within each faculty: a *faculty assembly* and a *faculty board*. The faculty assembly, which is essentially a consultative body, consists of all holders of professorships in the subject areas covered by that faculty and of holders of posts as teachers with a doctorate. The faculty board, on the other hand, makes decisions on matters concerning requests for and distribution of funds, planning of postgraduate education, etc. The board consists of about ten members: representatives of the researchers/teachers, the employees and the students, with the first category in the majority. On the board may also sit a representative of public interests and of research and development work outside the higher education system.

The uniform organization adopted for the management of higher education institutions in the 1977 reform was modified in a resolution passed by Parliament in 1984, aimed partly at adapting planning and management to local needs and at improving the co-ordination of undergraduate studies and research. For example, the institutions of higher education are now entitled to set up joint program committees and faculty boards, the intention being that this arrangement will make the organizational structure more flexible.

Financial aid to students

A fundamental principle in Swedish higher education is that all students who need help to finance their studies should receive assistance from the central government for this purpose. This aid takes the form of student grants and loans, collectively described as "post-secondary study assistance." To receive such assistance, a student must fulfill certain requirements. For example, the grants and loans are means-tested and may be reduced depending on the student's own income. But in deciding the amount of study assistance to be paid, no account is taken of the economic situation of the student's parents or spouse. A person aged 45 or over cannot, as a rule, receive study assistance. In general a person may receive study assistance for a maximum of twelve terms (six years); exceptions can be made, for instance in the case of graduate students. To continue receiving study assistance, a person must show acceptable scholastic achievement. Foreign students not permanently domiciled in Sweden are not eligible to receive study assistance.

Study assistance consists of a non-repayable grant plus a larger repayable loan. A rate of interest equalling half the State deposit rate is charged on the loan portion. The principal grows with rising consumer prices or in accordance with the Government's decision. The non-repayable grant is about 30% of the total amount and, like the loan portion, is geared to the movement of prices. The grant portion currently totals SEK17,200 for a nine-month academic year. During 1991 the repayable loan portion was SEK40,800.

Repayment of the study loan begins not less than six months after the final receipt

of study assistance. Instalments are income-related, the rule being repayment at a rate of 4% of annual income. The rate of interest is fixed by the Government for one year at a time. Interest payments are not tax-deductible.

Students receiving central government study assistance, employment training grants or postgraduate fellowships can obtain a respite from payments for the duration of their studies. Instalments can also be reduced if income has declined substantially in relation to the income on which the annual instalment was based or if there are other compelling circumstances. Student loans are written off at death and at age 65.

Postgraduate studies are financed out of the research appropriation to which each university faculty is entitled. In all, SEK 410 million were appropriated for this purpose during the fiscal year 1989/90.

The faculty board can decide to spend the money either on posts for postgraduate studies or on fellowships, both running for four years. A fellowship can also be divided between two graduate students. A student who has succeeded in obtaining a post must concentrate on his or her research studies but can to some extent combine it with teaching or other types of work. The fellowship-holder may combine the research studies with a job on a research project or a part-time job as a teaching or administrative assistant. About one third of the graduate students in Sweden have now posts or fellowships for postgraduate studies.

Another, comparatively common way to finance postgraduate studies is to combine one's studies with a job on a research project funded by one of the national research councils or some other outside body.

Students in technical-vocational (YTH) programs receive a particularly advantageous form of financing known as adult study assistance. The purpose of this aid is to compensate for loss of income on the part of a person who has taken a leave of absence from a job in order to study. Adult study assistance consists of a taxable outright grant, plus a smaller repayable study loan.

Student unions

Students at Swedish universities and university colleges are required to become

members of a student union. At each institution of higher education there are one or more such organizations. They function as "trade unions" on behalf of students and, among other things, nominate student representatives to the various governing bodies in the higher education system. They are also responsible for a considerable share of so-called indirect student welfare services. To finance its activities, each union is entitled to levy membership fees.

Most of the local student unions are members of the National Association of Student Unions, which thus indirectly encompasses about 150,000 students.

Health and medical care services for students in central government-operated higher education are administered by the students' own organizations. In places where there is a special student health center, there are doctors and other paid staff. The student health centers are primarily concerned with preventive health care. They are not intended to replace the ordinary medical service that every citizen is entitled to. Rather, the student health centers are intended to complement this service in the special higher education environment. Student organizations also operate physical fitness programs. Both these services are financed by the central government and by the students themselves. Health care for students in local government-operated higher education is organized like the school health service.

It is the duty of higher education institutions to make any necessary modifications for the benefit of disabled students and to bear the expense involved, insofar as funding is not available from any other authority.

Over the past decades, the student organizations have built and administered a large number of student residence halls with the help of central government loans on favorable terms. The proportion of students living in these buildings varies from 10 to 40% in different university and university college towns. According to a parliamentary decision in the early 1970s, no new residence halls especially for students are to be built in Sweden. Instead students will be integrated into other types of housing. The existing student residence halls are expected eventually to be transferred to municipal non-profit housing corporations.

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